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ABSTRACT

This paper is a three-part narrative report of a study in which structured interviews were conducted with 30 professional women in higher education in West Berlin to determine their career attitudes and aspirations. Background information includes an account of the author's preparation for conducting the study and her concern for semantics in translating interview questions from English to German. The description of the method, which incorporates a view of the subjects' and the culture's attitudes toward females as professionals in higher education, is presented in four steps: Gaining an understanding of the administrative structure of the four institutions in West Berlin which were included in the study; gathering information on the comparative numbers of men and women at each rank of the professorial ladder at these institutions; selection of the 30 women to be interviewed; and conducting the actual interviews. Major conclusions discuss implications for the future of women professionals in higher education in West Germany, with two of the findings revealing that (1) most of the women feel that the bias against women in academia is so entrenched that they must not only perform exceptionally, but they must have great courage and strength to persist and advance, and (2) as far as choice of career was concerned, only 11 of the women ended up in their first choice. Of the other 19, at least half cited specific reasons related to discrimination against women for having to choose their second or third career option. (SH)

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THE CAREER PATHWAYS, ATTITUDES AND ASPIRATIONS OF PROFESSIONAL WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN WEST BERLIN, GERMANY

A Replication of a study carried out in Washington, D. C. by Gloria Freeman

by

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This study was conducted while the author was a Fulbright Research Fellow in 1975-76

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Why Berlin?

About a year ago now, I was visiting a seminar in Women's Studies at the Kennedy Institute for American Studies at the Free University in West Berlin. I had been asked to discuss my Fulbright research project which as the title of this paper indicates was a study of the career pathways, attitudes and aspirations of professional women in higher education institutions in West Berlin. The first question the students asked was "why Berlin?" The question is a significant one because of what it tells as well as what it asks. The answer is a rather obvious one. Having had some prior experience in the German culture, I made Germany my first choice in applying for a Fulbright in order to capitalize on my experience, and I was assigned to Berlin because I happened to meet a Berlin professor who was able to arrange an invitation for me there. Much more interesting and fundamental to anyone doing research in a foreign culture is the message the question revealed. One aspect of the message relates to the reservations that sophisticated persons have about becoming the objects of a study. This is equally true in the sub-cultures here at home and foreign cultures as well. Beyond that the question implied reservations about having such a study made by an American. The question also speaks to the very political self-consciousness of the residents of this pecular international city; isolated as they are, they feel cut off and different from the rest of West Germany. They even refer to themselves ambivalently as the 51st American state. Further my own self-consciousness about the then current revelations of the covert operations of the CIA throughout the world, made me wonder if they were checking me out. I should add to this the thought that although Berlin and Frankfurt are the leading centers of women's liberation in Germany, the concern even there is not very wide spread and in academe it is almost beneath the dignity of most men and even some of the women. Those who are really involved in securing equal opportunities for women thanked me for making the study and suggested that only an American could have made that study in Berlin at the time.

Making preparations for a study in another culture, though in actuality they are endlessly time-consuming, can be quite simply stated. First of course is the matter of language, and depending on how well you can use it, everything else is easier or more difficult. My plans to take the first six months of my year to perfect my use of the language were washed out when my university which is undergoing a reorganization process felt I could not be spared for a whole year and I compromised for six months of my time. Therefore, for me everything was harder than it otherwise might have been. Preparation includes experiencing and understanding many phases of the culture -- people, things, events, history, politics and of course in my case, the educational system. I was fortunate to make some most helpful contacts with persons who were willing and able to guide me to the best sources of information and experience without wasting valuable time. Nevertheless, to learn enough quickly enough was quite a challenge and I will admit that there were moments when I felt I was skating on pretty thin ice.

Additional preparation problems arise when, the study is a replication of one being carried out back home in this country. In the first place one has to decide whether a structured interview can be administered in English or whether it must be translated. In my case it was important to me to use it in English and in the end I found that by eliminating only a very few of the persons listed in my original sample, I was able to use the English version. There is a further problem, however, in explaining the questions of the original interview structure; for while words could be translated when necessary, meanings were often likely to be misunderstood. This relates to the whole question of the values of a culture being different from those of the person creating the interview schedule, and also to the different structure of the educational

institutions. It was incumbent upon me to understand those different values and that different structure with all the nuances so that I could sense possible confusion on the part of my interviewees and explain ideas clearly to them to be sure I was getting correct information for purposes of comparison.

And then this one last word by way of introduction. Because of its role in international politics, Berlin is not the most typical German city. Nevertheless, within certain limitations which I will not take time to explain here, extrapolations from the Berlin educational situation can be made for the rest of the country from this study in regard to the role of professional women in higher education.

The Process

I am quite satisfied with the plan I made for my six months-study because it worked very well and little by little unfolded before me the facts and the understandings I needed; and with the addition of one more step perhaps, I now have my own approach for doing comparative studies which I hope fate will give me the opportunity to use several more times.

For this study I needed to gain a thorough understanding of the higher education institutions in Germany and I spent much of the first month meeting administrators at the four institutions at which I would be working: the College of Education, the Free University, the College of Fine Arts and the Technical University. Among them, these institutions serve some 50-70 thousand students. This subject is complicated by the fact that in 1969 Berlin passed a university law that changed the system quite drastically with the intent of democratizing a system which had been very elitist. Not so long ago the full professor with tenure and a chair--which means being in charge of a department or division for life--this person held one of the highest social roles in the culture, higher certainly than anyone in an administrative role in the university, but also higher than other prominent roles like judges etc. This person hired whom he liked and controlled admissions and budget, and together with other like persons made university policy. Administrators were more like clerks to carry out the bidding of this group.

Now under the new law, you could say the university is run by committee, and you will be able to understand that this causes some new problems. The chairperson is now elected by the committee which runs the department, and the committee is elected from faculty, staff and students bodies. Because of the sharp political distinctions between and among these bodies which vary all the way from the traditional conservative to the out-and-out-Marxist, it is often very difficult for these committees to accomplish their tasks. Therefore, not only are meetings apt to be endless and a terrible drain on time of the professor which he cherishes for serious reading, writing and teaching but additionally they have robbed the position of chairman of all its former power and glory. Needless to say then professors are more apt to fulfil their terms out of a sense of duty, then they are to aspire to the position of chairperson. Inevitably then the administration is picking up more power as it picks up the coordinating role. Nevertheless the traditional value of the scholar role, robbed as it is of power and influence, still means everything to many professors and they are not ready to admit that administrators are running the universities. Pushed to the point they will admit that the democratization was necessary and that they may even have voted for it, but many still nostalgically cling to the erstwhile elitist role of the professor.

For my study it was necessary to look into this confusion as deeply as possible because of the nature of the sample of the study. In the American study which I replicated, the sample had been based on chosing women in Washington, D. C. who were in the highest positions in the colleges and universities. This meant that the sample included one woman president, six or seven vice presidents and seven or eight deans as well as a distribution of faculty members. In Berlin then, to chose the women in the highest positions was to chose women at the top of the professorial structure, administration being held as something lower. Many of the questions in the American study related to women's aspirations to move on up the ladder to administrative positions. While those questions brought almost always predictably negative answers in the Berlin study, the explanations of these answers provided valuable insights into the German character and ways of thinking.

As a second step, it was necessary to get help from each of the four institutions to develop a chart showing the comparative numbers of men and women at each rank of the professorial ladder. In Berlin the ranking is not done by titles as it is here, but rather by a designation known as AH 1, AH 2, AH 3, AH 4, AH 5, and AH 6, the latter being the highest, most coveted and by far the hardest to get. You would be interested to know that out of 5,134 professors in the four institutions, there are 539 men in the highest rank and nine women. At steps three through five, there are 943 men and 125 women, and at steps one and two, there are 2566 men and 438 women. The totals then are 4,571 men and 563 women. If you consider that many of these positions are tenured--all those from step 3 up--then you will see that the opportunities for women will not improve too much for a long time, especially since the universities in Germany like those here are no longer expanding.

The third step was to develop my sample of thirty women to be interviewed. As stated previously then, the women in the highest positions in academe in Berlin would be women in the AH 6 level. My interest was to get a number of women in the two highest levels to compare with the vice presidents and deans in the American sample and then a sampling across the other ranks and also to ascertain that I had women from a variety of disciplines and from each of the schools. If a woman could not use English at all, it was necessary to eliminate her from the sample, but if it seemed that we could get through the interview with a mixture of English and German, she was retained. I should mention here that I did try a couple of interviews with an interpreter and gave it up as a bad job, for two reasons. In the first place, Germans are very private persons, and not about to discuss private things easily. When an interpreter was present the informality of the dyad relationship turned into the formality of a triad. Beyond that there is a great competition and political pressure among the faculty members and they would not like to reveal their feelings with another German present. Additionally there were translation problems. Questions in English that were invented to squeeze out a nuance, seemed like the same question over and over in German and the interviewees became quickly impatient. In English I could explain the nuance and the question was therefore respectable.

The fourth step was the interviews themselves, and what a precious, rare opportunity the interviews provided to become intimately acquainted with the lives of my professional counterparts in another culture! For the most part I could conduct only one interview a day. Berlin is a big city and it could well take one and one-half hours each way by public transportation to meet an interviewee. Add to that possible three-hour travel stint, a period of at least one and one-half hours for the interview, and many times up to three hours, plus another one and one-half for writing up the interview afterwards, and one interview becomes a day's work. Scheduling the interviews was a time-consuming process in itself, explaining my purpose to endless numbers of secretaries, in German, only to have to call and call again to finalize a time. Also I was hit with a two-month university vacation period right in the middle of my stay, when every faculty member who could arrange it took off for West Germany (which is the way they express it) or for the Canary Islands or somewhere. Not only is it understandable that anyone would want a change if possible to escape briefly the feeling of being in a walled city but travel is a prestige symbol in Germany.

The interviews themselves of course were the most important moments of my experience, for which all else was preparation and from which all vital information would flow. The situations are as vivid in my mind today as the days that they actually occurred. We met in offices, apartments, homes, faculty lounges and res-

taurants. I can picture each woman in great detail, what she wore, her attitude toward the interview and how that attitude may have developed or changed as we got to know each other better; and I can still hear the quality of the voices and the stories they told about their lives. From the matter of the interviews, however, stem two very important considerations. In just about every case, I had to pledge absolute anonymity in publishing the results and they then put their faith in my word. I will certainly adhere to this but it does force me to lay aside some of the really significant anecdotal material which would shed light on the statistics.

The second major consideration that stems from the experience of the interviews in relation to the study was a bearing on all research done by questionnaire or interview. I refer to the inexactitude of the answers, the lack of precision and the amount of contradictory material. Statistical formulas may supposedly correct for such human subjectivity, but I will always be a cynic in this regard. As as much as I was appalled by what I learned about how differently different persons perceive the same question and therefore give quite incomparable answers, I am also heartened because such rich subjective experience is too precious to be counted. The random nature of significant experience is the miracle that allows us our individualism. Some things can be counted -- the number of children, the number of women at each rank etc. -- but I will make every effort to avoid spurious precision.

Earlier I mentioned that I would add one additional step to my process were I to repeat this kind of research. Glaser and Strauss warn repeatedly that continuous analysis must accompany the collection of data in this kind of social science research. Given the problem of the pressure of time, nevertheless I did try to heed their advice, but were I to do it again, I surely would be ever so much more systematic about it. For when I came back to this country to do my analysis new questions arose that really intrigued me and in fact I did send back one small questionnaire, but even though I send a second mailing I got less than a 50% response and the answers are too brief to be really helpful.

The Findings

At this point a brief synopsis of the results of the study would probably be helpful before we analyze some of the findings related to individual variables. One phrase that I heard used over and over could be used as a very cogent title of my study, namely, "If a woman is really good..." Or another, the woman will have to be "the last kick" and then she stands a chance of getting to the top.

At any rate, the study shows that women in professional positions in higher education institutions in West Berlin are in a very definite minority with very poor prospects of equality in the very near future. Only nine women compared with 539 men, are in the top rank in the Berlin universities, and only slightly over 10% of the 5134 faculty members in that city are women, most of whom are in the lower ranks. The women who have made it to the top and those still aspiring to the top ranks have played their roles according to the traditionally male definition. They have mostly remained single in order to devote their time to their careers, and the married women have very few if any children. Of the eight in the sample who are married, at least five have worked out arrangements that provide equal responsibility or nearly equal responsibility among both partners for the duties relating to the care of the home and their private lives. Most of the women are not directly connected with the feminist movement. Mostly they realize the importance of the movement but they cannot siphon off their own time and energy to become involved. They feel the bias against women in academe is so entrenched, even if not always admitted, that they must not only perform exceptionally, but they must have great courage and strength to persist and advance. Some of those who do become involved in the movement become disaffected with the university life. They feel that in spite of the democratization law the university tends to be stuffy and less than humane and the price a woman has to pay in terms of her personal life and development are too great. A number of the younger women in the sample are therefore moving out of the university setting. Some other young women have dug their heels in to stay and fight to humanize the role of the university professor for the benefit of both men and women. The current cutback in hiring is working against younger women who came in on the wave of expansionism in the sixties. As the last hired, they are the last to get new contracts. Since men already hold a vast majority of the tenured positions, there seems little likelihood that the number of women in the Berlin universities will be increasing very rapidly.

In this short paper it will be impossible to discuss very many of the variables from which I have drawn these conclusions.

A starting point might be to look at the educational pathways of the women, why and how they chose specific fields and what degrees they hold and why.

It is safe to say that all the women in this sample came from homes that were at least middle class and some higher. Their families were a little deviant from prevailing cultural norms in that for the most part they believed that the education of girls was important. This is especially true of the older women. Some of the younger women seem to have made it without such strong parental support and this is perhaps because of the increased support from society as a whole with the rising expectations of women today. In such a traditionally patriachal society as Germany, it is to be expected that fathers did carry the most weight in influencing the educational decisions

of these women. In many cases where it was stated that father and mother carried equal influence, it can be pretty well substantiated from anecdotal material that the mother, like the daughter, was influenced by the father's opinion to some extent. Additionally, in cases where the mother was given as most influential, there were almost no fathers alive or present. It is most interesting to note that there are very few brothers of the women in the sample. This suggests very strongly that these particular women received special encouragement and educational advantage not only because there was less competition within the family but also because they inherited the very important responsibility of carrying on the status of the family.

With the older women, the war was a definite factor in their education, and not always a negative factor. While the war forces some to postpone their education, interrupt it, or change it, the war also opened possibilities for the shortage of men. One woman who was advised against becoming a medical doctor for all the regular chauvenistic reasons, found that she was forced to perform the role during the war without education and therefore knew afterwards that there was no reason for a woman not to become a doctor. Other women who might have married and given over their careers, at least to part-time careers, did not find suitable husbands after the war. Other women suggested that they developed determination to be self-sufficient because they saw about them so many women made widows by the war who had no way of supporting themselves -- no training, education, or work experience.

As for the question of role models, there is no trend, except that in so far as models were identified they were more apt to be male than female. However, in answering this question imprecision reigned supreme. Respondents might deny the existance of any and then with probing from the interviewer discover some possible model, or having stated one, then change their minds about it. Furthermore there may be a cultural bias against this question, since it might be seen as detracting from the great German virtue of rigorous individual strength. Nine women in the sample of thirty insisted that they along had created their own role ideals.

As far as the choice of career is concerned only eleven of the women ended up in their first choice. Of the other nineteen at least half cited specific reasons related to discrimination against women for having to choose their second or third option. More of the older women were actually working at their first choice. This perhaps suggests that they were ready to step into the vacuum right after the war. Especially if they had managed to keep their names clear of personal identification with the Nazi regime, they were allowed by the Allies to accept positions right away. As for the younger women and some of the older ones too who were career-oriented because they did not have the opportunity to marry, there seems to be hit or miss factor in ending up in a particular career. This may well have been a coping mechanism in a society that did not give them first chance. If hurdles appeared in their paths, they were flexible enough to change the route of their paths..

Once on the career path, however, they have almost without exception continued without interruption. Their record could hardly be more solid.

I cannot say how their publications compare with those of men in their departments, but they have substantial publishing records.

As for degrees, only three do not have or are not working on the doctorate. These three are in the College of Fine Arts and are well-known performers who do not require the doctorate to serve their profession. There is an advanced degree called the "Habilitation" which one earns by virtue of excellence in her field which all the women do not

have and some do not aspire to. Only ten of the women have it thus far. Some will not even try for it because they are near retirement and it cannot enhance their situation much now. Some young women are not planning to work for it because they do not want to stay at the university. Others who want it cannot get it for reasons of politics and discrimination.

This takes us on to the question of aspirations. It is safe to say that the women are very conditioned by their culture to be more content at lower levels then are the men. Many of the thirteen women at the AH 5 level which is next to the top have given over all hope of taking the last step, especially since the University Law prohibits those who took their degree in Berlin from being given the top rank there without having some years of experience elsewhere. This would mean getting out and entering the tough competition for a job in West Germany, and if they were fortunate enough to find them, then breaking up their homes in Berlin, leaving their life-long friends etc. In the few cases where there are husbands involved, it becomes somewhat impossible.

I have also spoken about the lack of aspirations to go up the career ladder at the university of at least five younger women, since they would rather go out into other work which they feel is less dehumanizing.

As for aspiring to administrative posts, it has already been pointed out that administration is perceived as being beneath the professional scholar. I have suggested that the power of the administration may be changing with the new University Law, and several of the younger women seem to be catching a glimmer of the fact that if there are no women in positions of administration, it may mean there are some good jobs there where women could wield some power. In living memory there has only been one women in administration in Berlin, and she was a vice president for a matter of two years.

I think you will see from the foregoing, why it seems to be that equality for women in the higher education institutions in Berlin is yet a long way off. The fact that 90% of the positions are held by men, many of whom are already tenured, in itself poses a tremendous hurdle for women. Rentrenchment in hiring is another. Additionally, the women are not organized but are playing the game according to male rules, and male rules give only token consideration to women. Also the culture encourages women to have lower aspirations than men.

One hesitates to make recommendations to women in another culture. It is apparent, however, that those women who are frustrated in their career ambitions will never be able to change the scene unless they organize their efforts somehow. Several small attempts have been made, somewhat unsuccessfully thus far because of the small number of women ready to put themselves on the line.

One recommendation I can make with impunity is that women must help each other across cultures. The women I interviewed are very anxious that I get my study published and into the hands of significant persons back in Berlin. They felt my interviews with male administrators served a consciousness-raising purpose. The very fact that no figures had even been published about the numbers of women in the various ranks in Berlin shows the level of consciousness of the problem.

In closing, however, I should be remiss if I did not point out that the help does not go all in one direction. I must admit that as a result of my interviews with so many exceedingly capable and brilliant men and women in Berlin, my own understanding of higher education, its challenges and problems and purposes in the modern world have been greatly enhanced and I am most grateful to them for this experience.